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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKER'S CHAT — Thursday, September 14, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MIGRANTS." Information from the Farm Security Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture. (First of two chats.)

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"California, here we come!" Or Arizona, Texas, Florida, - even New Jersey. The stream of migratory families seeks field or orchard work wherever rumor says there are crops to be harvested--toward the west, up and down the fertile valleys of the Pacific Coast, in the states that touch the Gulf of Mexico, or on the Atlantic seaboard. Where their rickety, overloaded jalopies congregate there is usually a labor glut. More people desperately seeking work than jobs available. Wages depressed until whole families working from sun-up to sundown scarcely earn enough to keep from starving. A few weeks or days on one crop, - and then it's pack up and move on. Most of them are wondering, "Where can we go now?"

The Federal government, through the Farm Security Administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is called on to help answer that question for some of these people.

Much has been written about the migrants in California. But other states have migratory agricultural workers, too. They pick hops, berries, prunes, apples and other fruits in Washington and Oregon. In Arizona it's cotton, lettuce, and truck vegetables. In Utah it's beets. Idaho potatoes and beets have to be harvested, as well as several other truck crops. Melons and lettuce in Colorado, cotton in the high plains of Oklahoma and northern Texas. Texas also has a large body of migratory farm workers within its own borders, moving from south to north and back. Arkansas' cottonfields, and Florida's citrus orchards, and New Jersey's

cranberry bogs all use migrant labor of the family type. When the crop is in, the workers are out. Their homelessness is becoming a national problem.

Who are these migrants? Where do they come from? And why are they wanderers? Many of the families have children, who are growing up under terrible living conditions, without schooling or proper food. Why don't the parents settle down somewhere?

The answer is: There's no place for them to go. The Farm Security Administration reports that many of these people are the victims of tremendous change and upheaval. Some are dust bowl farmers of the Great Plains, driven in desperation to seek new land. Others are dispossessed tenant farmers and share-croppers who have been "tractored out." Driven from an already precarious livelihood in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and other southern states, they have sought agricultural work in the supposedly richer area further west. They are the "Arkies" and "Okies" you have read about. Just struggling farm families looking for a chance to work.

The introduction of power machinery on large farms results in the wholesale eviction of tenant families. For example: One Alabama county had 8 farm tractors a few years ago. Last year that county had 260 tractors. And Farm Security officials estimate that each tractor has forced one and a half to two families off the land. Nearly 500 homeless families from that one county. The FSA men figure that about 350,000 families are on the move the country over, looking for work.

These are native, white, farm families chiefly. The crops that require large numbers of seasonal harvest hands were formerly brought in by bands of single roving workers. Many of them were Mexican, coolie, Hindu, or Philippine laborers, willing to work for very low wages and live under intolerable conditions.

Now whole families follow the crops, living in shacks, tents, and shelters patched together from boards and tin cans, along ditch banks and streams. Sanitary conditions are a menance to health. Food is inadequate. Sickness is rife. The

children have little or no chance to go to school. Annual earnings for whole families range from $200 to $450 a year. Because they are unwelcome non-residents, most states do not extend public relief when work gives out. What are they to do?

To meet the immediate need for better living conditions the Farm Security Administration has provided, or is now building, 13 model stationary camps in California, 4 in Texas, 3 in Arizona, 2 in Idaho, one in Oregon, one in Washington, and 2 in Florida. Some of these camps have a few low-cost houses for rent. Families reasonably sure of steady work nearby can rent them for less than $10 a month.

In addition to these stationary camps, several states have also one or more mobile camps. These camps are packed up and taken by trucks to another location as the migrants follow the crops. All the FSA camps have medical units made up of a clinic with a nurse in charge and a visiting doctor. The mobile camps take their medical units along on trailer trucks. In a short time I'll tell you more about some of these camps and how they are run.

But there's another way to meet the problem of the migratory farm family. This is to provide help at its point of origin, before the family starts to leave their home state.

Some have farm land that is worthless. Some of those may be located on better land within the state. On the other hand, some of the run-down farms may possibly be reclaimed under a different system of farming. The families that are on these farms may rent or buy them under the Bankhead - Jones Act. These families, when approved as hard-working, conscientious, cooperative fold, may get a money loan and a plan for managing the farm to yield a better living.

The plan includes repayment of the loan. They may even get a grant to tide them over until the first paying crops are in. The great majority of families who have made such loans are repaying them regularly, and at the same time have increased their possessions and assets by several hundred dollars' worth. Best of all, these Farm Security clients have not joined the stream of unfortunate families limping over the highways in search of work.

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